

**COMMUNITY DIALOG
ON
TRANSPORTATION AND LAND USE**

Meeting Summary of March 19th, 2003

Supervisor Sharon Bulova welcomed attendees of the fifth meeting of the Community Dialog on Transportation and Land Use (Community Dialog). She explained that the topic for the evening's program was the "Political Dynamics" of getting things accomplished in the state and in the region. She introduced each of the speakers, explaining first that Steve Eldridge of WTOP had been called unexpectedly out of town earlier that day and so would not be joining the discussion.

Panelists were asked to make a brief opening statement about their experiences with getting something accomplished.

Dave Albo began by saying that perseverance was key to getting things done. It's important to stay on top of your bill or it can get killed without your having a chance to advocate for it.

Vivian Watts said that the most important element in getting things done was to work out the details of what you are trying to do. She stressed the importance of working behind the scenes and described her success in 1985, a short session in the General Assembly, and winning approval of a formula change that benefited Fairfax County. She also described the passage of the Route 28 special taxing district, which is a win/win method of collecting special taxes by the business owners in the Rt. 28 corridor so road improvements could be constructed sooner in order to support that growing commercial/industrial area.

Chap Peterson said that he is able to view transportation as a consumer. He is the parent of two young children and is a commuter on the Vienna Metro. As a former member of the Fairfax City Council, he is especially proud of winning approval of a CUE bus shuttle which serves the GMU and City of Fairfax area.

Chairman Kate Hanley began the session by setting the stage for the evening's discussion. As her introduction demonstrated, she wears many hats, serving on a variety of regional bodies, including the newly created Northern Virginia Transportation Authority. Chairman Hanley described the "yin and the yang" of transportation. We do have a Comprehensive Plan and a Regional Transportation Plan and we need to decide on how to implement it. She described the "yin and yang" of roads vs. transit; regional vs. local; rural vs. urban; old bridges (Arlington) vs. unpaved roads (Loudoun).

Chairman Hanley spoke about our region's recent re-classification by the EPA from the "serious" air quality designation to "severe". This requires us to consider the effects of

transportation projects on air quality. We must not exceed our “budget” for air quality compliance or we risk the loss (to the entire region) of federal transportation funding.

Chairman Hanley said that the funding “pie” for transportation is not getting any larger, yet congestion in the region is growing worse, creating pressure to identify new sources of revenue. She described past methods of funding transportation, like a transfer tax for improving Rt. 58 in southwest Virginia. A local gasoline tax supports, in part, the operation of Metro. In the early 90’s, Fairfax County attempted to fill the gap in transportation funding shortfalls by putting road projects to referendum. These Transportation Bond Referenda passed easily, and helped to build projects such as the Fairfax County Parkway. However, transportation funding is traditionally a state responsibility. By funding road construction via bonds paid for through the County’s General Fund, we found our limited debt capacity straining to accommodate traditional County responsibilities such as School construction and renovations, police and fire stations, parks and libraries.

In response to a question from the group, Chairman Hanley explained the voting structure of the new Northern Virginia Transportation Authority. In order to approve projects, members representing 2/3 of the population in the Northern Virginia must agree.

Bob Griendling said that a number of years ago in Alameda County, California a tax referendum failed. Two years later, after getting the community together on the issue, the referendum passed by 80% of the vote. Could we get the competing groups together in Northern Virginia to try to work out a resolution to our situation? Chairman Hanley expressed frustration with getting something like that done in a Dillon Rule state, where we lack the flexibility and authority to choose a particular course of action that could eventually be put to referendum. Chairman Hanley then excused herself in order to leave for a community association meeting.

In response to Bob Griendling’s question, Chap Peterson said that he thought we should get more “buy in” from the community as we considered where we go from here, now that the sales tax referendum has failed. He said groups such as the Smart Growth Coalition need to be involved.

Vivian Watts said the problem is that we are fighting over “crumbs”. In the past, if the region agreed that it wanted or needed something specifically targeted to us, the General Assembly often agreed. Because of shrinking transportation dollars, the General Assembly is more resistant to allowing individual jurisdictions to have what they ask for.

Jeff Nolan asked about the governor’s new “Spot Improvement” program. This is similar to a program begun by the County several years ago, where “little buck – big bang” projects were selected that could improve traffic flow relatively quickly. The state program could fund projects on a larger scale than the County program. One of the projects requested by the County for this new program is “subscription bus service” for the Rolling Road and Burke Centre VRE lots. Riders could sign up for the service, which

would relieve our parking situation at these two stations, while we implement larger scale solutions, i.e. structured parking.

Supervisor asked members of the panel **“What would you do differently, knowing what you know now, with regard to the Sales Tax for Transportation Referendum?”**

Speaking generally about getting something accomplished, Dave Albo repeated his theme for perseverance. He said that it is important to know more about your subject matter than others in the room. He said it's often more important to listen than to talk. No one is wrong – look at both sides. You never get 100% of what you're seeking.

Delegate Albo gave a number of examples where he was able to get his bills passed over early opposition and failure. An example is recently passed legislation allowing communities to ban large, unsightly trucks and trailers. He took photos to show to members of the General Assembly Committee, listened to their opposing views, and was able to respond and tailor his bill to avoid opposition.

Vivian Watts stressed the importance of spelling out specifics. She passed out copies of several charts which clearly and graphically demonstrated the lack of transportation funding. In seeking changes to funding formulas, she said that we should be asking that vehicles-miles-traveled by lane-mile be incorporated into the equation.

Chap Peterson said any transportation funding and planning initiatives must include the smart growth issue. We need to scale down our expectations. Rail to Dulles is a great goal, but that may not be able to happen for 10 years or so. Maybe we need to look at lower cost short term alternatives such as BRT (Bus Rapid Transit). Regarding fares, he said don't kill the user. Whether its bus or VRE, fares need to be affordable. Delegate Petersen said that we must always be looking outside the box at high tech innovative solutions, such as telework, for answers to our transportation congestion.

In response to a question from Peter Skoro about the Dillon Rule, Dave Albo said that instead of fighting the Dillon Rule, constituents should approach their legislators for things that are needed.

Vivian Watts responded that Arlington County had acquired additional authorities by adopting a County Charter. This was explored by Fairfax County about ten years ago under the chairmanship of Tom Davis, but never pursued. Delegate Watts said she had viewed the (failed) sales tax proposal as a way of gaining local control over Richmond.

Jan Heditniemi shared that we should use technology in Virginia similar to what is done in Maryland, making sure that cable and wires are installed while new roads are being built.

Walt Mika asked about getting more authority, like cities in Virginia have, by taking over our roads in Fairfax County. How do cities get funding for this? Supervisor Bulova said

that the County had explored this about 10 years ago but rejected the idea. While gasoline taxes for road maintenance would shift from the State to the County, funding would not be sufficient to meet current demands, much less the higher expectations that residents would have for improved service.

Nell Hurley offered that bonds are so cheap now; can we save money by refinancing? Supervisor Bulova responded that the County was selling bonds right now and getting great rates. We have also refinanced bonds in order to realize the savings available through current interest rates.

Bob Griendling asked for a show of hands from the audience and panel as to whether or not the Sales Tax Referendum would have passed if it had had school construction on the ballot as well as transportation. The response was mixed and a brief discussion ensued about this.

Bernice Colvard asked about better synchronization of traffic lights to improve traffic flow. Supervisor Bulova explained that lights have been synchronized, but the volume of traffic has oversaturated capacity to point where the synchronization is not apparent, or effective.

The group briefly discussed the “trust” issue with concern about transportation dollars really being kept for transportation. A “firewall” is needed between the State’s Transportation Trust Fund and the General Fund. Jim Buratti expressed concern about “open ended projects” and that the development community was pushing the sales tax referendum.

Paul Kite raised the issue of illegal immigrants being able to legally obtain driver’s licenses. Dave Albo responded that his bill dealt with this issue. It had passed the General Assembly and was awaiting the signature of the governor.

Mark Werfel asked about whether the health costs of our residents were sufficiently considered, as people sit in congestion and breathe polluted air.

Supervisor Bulova thanked the panelists and Community Dialog Group for their participation in that evening’s session. She announced that, in response to suggestions from a number of members of the Group, the April 2nd meeting would be devoted to a discussion on the land-use and development side of the equation. This will be the last Community Dialog session to include a panel discussion. After April 2nd, Dialog members will meet independently of her to discuss and formulate recommendations to be presented to the Board of Supervisors and regional bodies serving our area.

Chair: Supervisor Sharon Bulova

Staff:

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Participants:

Ms. Nancy Baltrusch
Mr. George Barker
Mr. Richard Bowes
Mr. James Buratti
Mr. Dennis Chamot
Ms. Bernice Colvard
Mr. Christopher Craig
Mrs. Dorothy Dane
Mr. Dan Desko
Mr. Ivan Dietrich
Mr. Robert Griendling
Ms. Suzanne Harsel
Ms. Jan Hedetniemi
Ms. Nell Hurley
Mr. Russell Klosk
Mr. Michael Malak
Ms. Phyliss McDevitt
Mr. Chet McLaren
Mr. Tom Meany
Mr. Walter Mika
Mr. John Miranda
Mr. Jeffery Nolan
Mr. Fidel Ortega
Mr. Thomas Reinkober
Ms. Judy Rexrode
Mr. Mike Salmon
Ms. Winnie Shapiro
Mr. Peter Skoro
Mr. Harry Stevenson
Mr. Jeff Stoll
Mr. Timothy Unrine

Ms. Terry Wanbaugh
Mr. Mark Werfel